



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

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Ref:DV134-01
April 25, 2001

TO: Jay & Kylanne Sandelin, 477 Tamarack Creek Rd., Whitefish, 59937
Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Helena, 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Bldg., PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Director's Office, Legal Unit, and Enforcement
Evaleen Starkel, Montana Dept. of Livestock, Third Floor, Scott Hart Bldg., 301 Roberts, Helena, 59620
Mt Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Bldg., Helena 59620
Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
John Munding, Consulting for Creative Solutions, LLC, 1414 Hauser Blvd., Helena, 59601
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th, Bozeman, 59715
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S. Main, Kalispell, 59901
Rep. Bob Lawson, PO Box 686, Whitefish, 59937-0686
Sen. Bob Depratu, PO Box 1217, Whitefish, 59937-1217

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Sandelin's

Following an Environmental Analysis (EA) prepared last August for the Velvet Ridge alternative livestock expansion project (Jay and Kylanne Sandelin, owners) near Whitefish, MT, FWP was informed of some desired changes to the proposal. Primarily this involved fencing and using a 25-foot vegetative buffer strip along the north boundary of the original 12-acre facility to use as an alleyway for the movement of elk between pens. This 25-foot vegetative buffer had been identified as a stipulation in the original 1997 Decision Document and also in the 2000 Proposal for Expansion as a mitigative measure to reduce the amount of nutrients and microbes that may be present in spring run-off to the north.

Because the proposed changes would require the altering or deleting of a required stipulation related to this alternative livestock facility, FWP has decided to solicit comments from the public in the form of a supplement to the draft EA dated August 3, 2001. As per ARM 12.2.440, a supplement must be prepared whenever an applicant makes a substantial change to a proposed project. As per the ARM rules, the same time periods applicable to the draft and final EA apply to the circulation and review of supplements.

The supplement is enclosed for your review. Questions and comments will be accepted until May 9, 2001. Please direct your questions or comments to Biologist Tim Thier, P.O. Box 507, Trego, MT 59934. After a two-week comment period, we expect to have responded to all comments and will have a decision completed by the end of May. If you have any questions, please contact Tim Thier at 882-4697.

Sincerely,

Dan Vincent
Dan Vincent
Regional Supervisor

DV/nli
Enclosure

Velvet Ridge Supplemental Draft EA
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c: John Smart, 125 Humbolt Loop, Helena, 59601
Gerri Backes, 720 White Basin Rd., Kalispell, 59901
Border Pipe & Supply, Attn: Randy Weaver, 27 N Central, Cut Bank, 59427
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**SUPPLEMENTAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT**

**PROPOSED EXPANSION OF
SANDELIN'S VELVET RIDGE
ALTERNATIVE LIVESTOCK OPERATION**

APRIL, 2001

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
REGION 1
490 NORTH MERIDIAN ROAD
KALISPELL, MONTANA 59901**

**DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Draft

PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SANDELIN'S VELVET RIDGE ALTERNATIVE LIVESTOCK OPERATION

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

PROPOSED ACTION

FWP received an initial application dated April 14, 2000, from Jay and Kylanne Sandelin to expand their alternative livestock facility in Flathead County, Montana. FWP received the application on April 19, 2000, and accepted the application as complete in a letter to the Sandelins dated May 17, 2000. The proposed expansion to the Velvet Ridge alternative livestock facility is located approximately 12 miles northwest of the town of Whitefish, Montana. The property is located on a tributary of Tamarack Creek, about 1 mile upstream of the creek's confluence with the Stillwater River. The applicants (Sandelins) live adjacent to the proposed expansion site.

The proposed expansion site is located immediately east of the existing licensed alternative livestock facility (License No. 134). The proposed alternative livestock facility is located in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 13, Township 31 North (T31N), Range 23 West (R23W) and would add 80 acres to the existing 12-acre facility. The existing facility is licensed for up to 20 elk in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 13, T31N, R23W. An EA and Decision Document were prepared by FWP in 1997 for the 12-acre alternative livestock facility.

The applicants propose that up to 160 alternative livestock be allowed in the 80-acre expansion area on a year-round basis, including 110 elk, 10 white-tailed deer, 10 mule deer, 10 caribou, 10 bighorn sheep, and/or 10 mountain goats. The species distribution, however, would be subject to change based on future market conditions. The expansion is expected to be completed by the fall of 2002. The combined existing and proposed alternative livestock facility would contain up to 180 alternative livestock on 92 acres.

Purposes of the proposed alternative livestock facility include breeding stock, meat and antler production, trophy sales, and other activities such as photography. The applicants have indicated, however, that shooting of alternative livestock by the public would not be allowed at the site. Alternative livestock to occupy the expanded facility would be procured from licensed facilities; however, none have been identified at this time. Wild animals would be removed from the enclosure by applicants prior to licensing by FWP.

Fence construction would be completed in accordance with requirements of FWP under ARM 12.6.1531. Fencing would consist of 8-foot high, high-tensile, Tigtlock steel wire fencing on steel posts, with higher fencing on steep slopes. The fence bottoms would be installed to provide not more than 3 inches of ground clearance. No exterior gates would be constructed for the proposed expansion fence (expansion area would be connected to the existing 12-acre facility). A handling and quarantine facility located in the existing 12-acre alternative livestock facility would be used for the proposed new facility.

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for the initially proposed expansion and was distributed for public comment on August 3, 2000. Public comment was accepted until August 25, 2000. Following the public comment period, a final site visit was conducted at the project site by FWP personnel to discuss various issues with the Sandelins. During this site visit, Mr. Sandelin stated that he was considering amending the project so that a 25-foot strip of land on the north boundary of the existing 12-acre alternative livestock facility be included in the expansion project. The intent of this inclusion was twofold:

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1. To provide an alleyway for efficient movement of alternative livestock from the future expansion pens past the north boundary of the existing 12-acre facility and finally emptying into the existing handling and quarantine area.
2. To provide a double-fencing situation on the northern boundary of both the existing facility and the proposed expansion.

In a letter dated February 9, 2001, and received at FWP on February 16, 2001, Mr. Sandelin confirmed that he would like to proceed with amending the original expansion project to include the 25-foot strip along the north corner of the existing 12-acre facility in the expansion project and provided a map of the amended project plan (see attached map). That 25-acre strip had been excluded from the original 12-acre facility under stipulation to serve as a buffer zone for filtration of any potential runoff from the facility due to its wetland nature. In reviewing the request, FWP determined that the request constituted a substantial change in a proposed action, and as such, a supplemental EA should be prepared to review the request and provide an opportunity for additional public comment.

ALTERNATIVES

One alternative, the No Action alternative, is evaluated in this supplemental EA. Under the No Action alternative, FWP would not authorize the addition of the 25-foot strip of land bordering the north fenceline of the existing 12-acre facility to be included in the proposed expansion project. Therefore, no alternative livestock would be placed or allowed in the proposed 25-acre strip of land. Implementation of the No Action alternative would not preclude other activities allowed under local, state, and federal laws to take place at the proposed alternative livestock site. The expansion project would be completed upon authorization as initially proposed without inclusion of the 25-foot strip of land.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The affected environment evaluated in this supplemental EA consists of a 25-foot strip of land approximately 1000 feet long, which borders the north fenceline of the existing 12-acre facility. This strip of land represents an additional 0.57 acres of land to be included in the proposed expansion. Land in that area has been classified as brush/rangeland.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Verbal communications with Mr. Sandelin indicate that use of the 25-foot strip of land will be intermittent. The applicant has stated that the 25-foot strip will be used as an alleyway to provide movement of alternative livestock from future expansion areas to an existing quarantine and handling facility located on the western edge of the current 12-acre facility, which was licensed in 1997. The 25-foot strip of land has been used as a buffer zone between the northern edge of the existing facility and neighboring property since licensing of the original facility. In an evaluation of the hydrological impacts of the original 12-acre project by RLK Hydro, Inc., they concluded that due to the silty and clayey nature of the underlying soils and the nearly level terrain, the migration of surface runoff will be limited. The 25-foot buffer zone was intended to act as a catchment and treatment zone for any nutrients or microbes generated within the project area. To function properly, this 25-foot vegetative strip was to be left undisturbed.

Environmental consequences of the inclusion of this 25-foot strip must be considered in conjunction with the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 80-acre expansion and the existing 12-acre facility. The original 12-acre facility was evaluated based on a maximum of 20 alternative livestock on 12 acres. The current expansion is being evaluated on the basis of a maximum of 160 animals on a total of 92 acres. The presence of the 25-foot vegetative buffer on the north boundary was included as a stipulation on the original facility since all animals were to be confined within the original 12 acres. It is anticipated that actually fewer animals will be

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present on the original 12-acre site in the future due to the increased space allowed by the 80-acre expansion.

The 80-acre expansion consists of land more suitable for grazing for elk and other ungulates than the original 12-acre site due to drier conditions in the upland areas. Immediate and long-term effects of the expansion would most likely be to decrease grazing pressure and use on the existing 12-acre facility. As a result, the potential for a reduction of vegetative cover, and the resulting increase in runoff and erosion, should also be reduced. Surface runoff is not expected to leave the immediate area except during the spring period. Groundwater is in confined, semi-confined, and/or low, permeable, clayey, glacial deposits, which greatly reduces the potential for contamination. Thus, the necessity for the 25-foot vegetative buffer is reduced, given the construction of the 80-acre expansion.

A secondary benefit of fencing the 25-foot vegetative buffer is that it will result in essentially a double fence for pens with which it borders.

EA SUPPLEMENT CONCLUSION

Based on the criteria evaluated in this supplement to the EA for an expansion of the Sandelin Velvet Ridge alternative livestock operation, an EIS is not required. Any impacts relevant to this supplement have been addressed both in this supplement and in the EA conducted on the expansion project.

Consideration of the No Action alternative would result in the second fence not being constructed and greater difficulty in moving animals from the 80-acre expansion to the quarantine and holding facilities. It would also not provide for a double-fence situation on the northern boundary of the existing 12-acre facility. Therefore, it is FWP's recommendation to accept this proposal as the preferred alternative for this supplement.

STIPULATIONS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

As a result of this supplemental EA, stipulation No. 2 of the EA draft dated August 3, 2000, which was conducted on the Sandelin Velvet Ridge expansion, will be eliminated. That stipulation is as follows:

1. A 25-foot vegetative buffer zone shall be maintained between the northern perimeter of the existing 12-acre portion of the alternative livestock enclosure and the adjacent property line. (Note: The purpose of this buffer zone is to filter out sediment, nutrients, and microorganisms from the runoff that may come from the enclosure area.)

The following stipulations will be added to the EA based on the conclusions of this supplemental EA:

1. The 25-foot strip of land will be used primarily as an alleyway for the movement of animals between various pens and pastures. Animals will be allowed to utilize the 25-foot strip for grazing purposes only between July 1 and November 1 of each year to help protect the existing vegetation.
2. The 25-foot strip of land will not be enclosed and included within the exterior boundaries of the facility until at least the first phase of the requested 80 acre expansion has been completed.

Stipulation No. 1 is intended to minimize potential compaction and vegetative disruption of the originally established buffer zone during the wet portion of the year. Runoff is most likely to occur during spring, and the functionality of the buffer zone would likely remain if it is not grazed during the spring period.

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Stipulation No. 2 is in place to assure that animal density is reduced within the original 12-acre facility prior to allowing use of the 25-foot strip of land. This shift in animal use should reduce the negative impacts from heavy grazing, such as increased runoff. A decrease in runoff and stocking density will decrease the need for the 25-foot vegetative buffer.

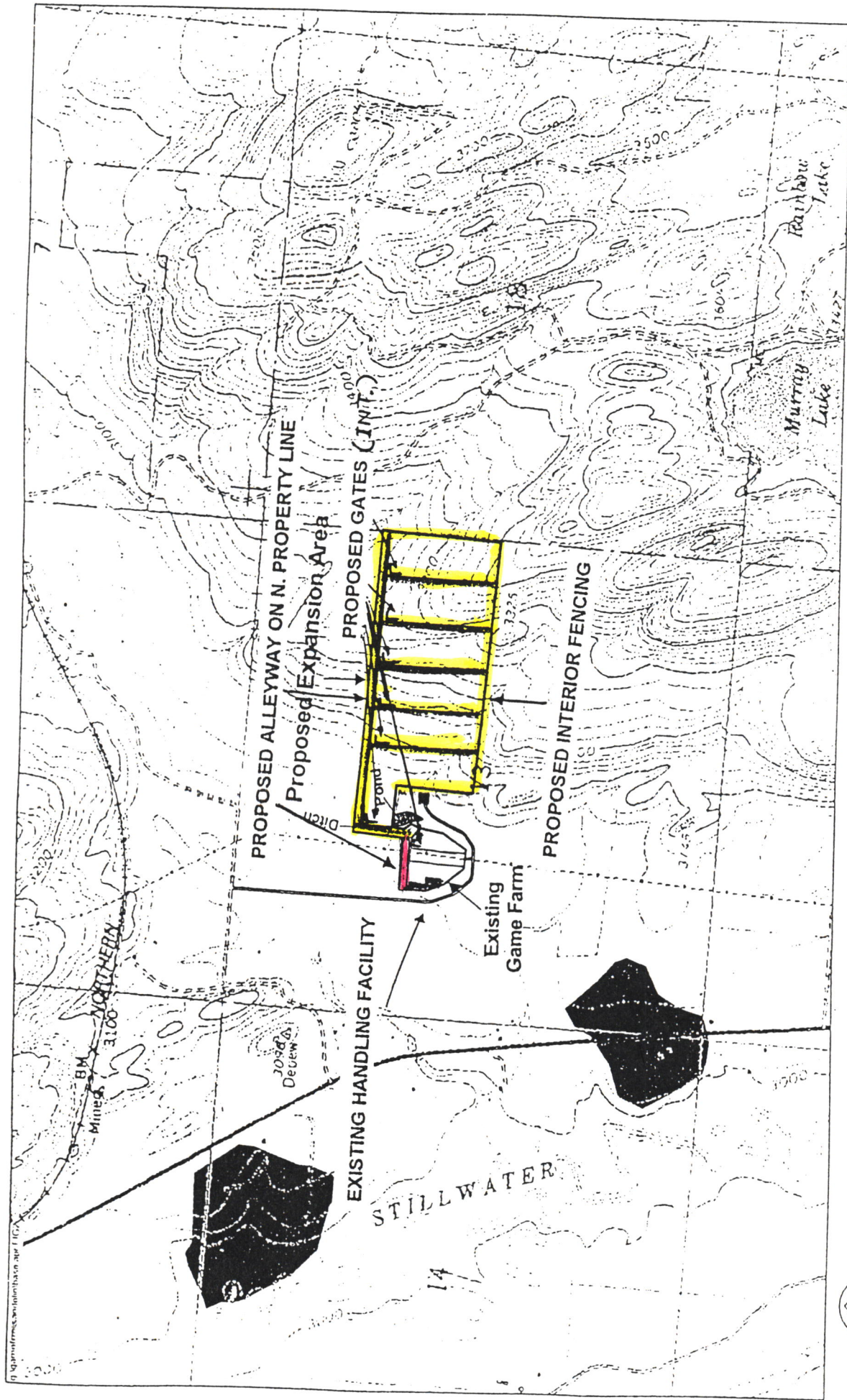
PUBLIC COMMENTS

Copies of this EA supplement will be sent to all adjoining landowners and potentially affected interests. Comments on this supplement will be solicited for a 14-day period, beginning April 25, 2001, and ending May 9, 2001. During the public comment period, copies of this supplement may be obtained from the FWP website at www.fwp.state.mt.us/ or by contacting Nancy Ivy at 752-4579.

Persons responsible for preparing this supplement:

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Land Use / Land Cover
 Sandealm - Velvet Ridge
 Alternative Livestock Operation Expansion EA
 Flathead County, Montana
 FIGURE 1

Residential
 Commercial
 Forested

Date: Land Use Information Derived From
 Montana Public Lands
 U.S. Bureau of Land Management
 1:50,000 Scale Maps
 Topographic Base Derived From
 U.S. Geological Survey Maps

0 100 1500



Scale